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ABSTRACT

Written as a resource for teachers, parents and poets working with young children, this publication offers advice about providing experiences with poetry to young children. Material focuses on the "frolicsome use of language," "snap-shot poetry experiences," and classroom poetry centers. Seven references are cited, and a bibliography provides 10 resources for children and 11 for teachers. (RH)

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POETRY EXPERIENCES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

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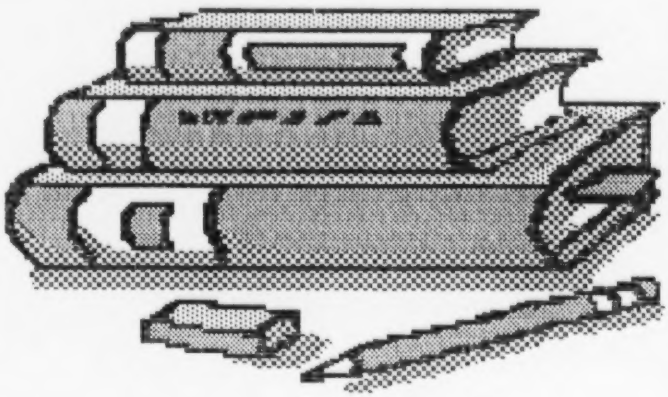

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Written and compiled as a resource for teachers, parents and poets working with young children.

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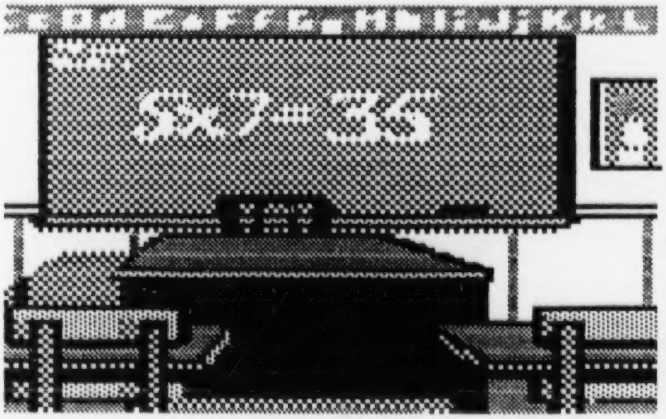

GETTING STARTED

Any child can write poetry. Any person can write poetry. Poetry is a vehicle open to anyone who loves to frolic with words, or put the feelings of his soul into writing.

For children to write poetry, they must first appreciate it. Reading to children, daily, from a variety of poetry forms will spur their interest. It is sometimes best to use simple riddles and silly rhymes first with little children. As time passes, or depending upon the age level, other forms can be introduced. There are many anthologies available written for children, or by children.

Poetry teacher Robert Wolsch suggests three areas of "focus" that children need to experiment in when learning to write poetry. The "playful invention" focus is described as the frolicsome use of language. The pleasurable effect is basically the sound of the words and rhythm of lines, largely for their own sake.

Here come the firemen
Sliding down the pole.
Zoom goes the truck
And out they roll

Susan, age 7

Up and down,
Up and down,
Up and down
on the elevator
Up and down
Up and down
Up and down
on the escalator

Jeanne, age 5

The "behavioral focus" expresses personal feelings that have been brought about by experiences; some good, some bad. Children in this focus are responding to some feeling, a rememberance, loss, desire, belief, etc. Intense feelings are caught in the moment of the poem in this focus. Feelings are caught in appropriate verse in the poem, some rhymed, some unrhymed. The language of the poem catches the spirit of the behavior being presented.

A house is a house
A mouse is a mouse
A rat is a rat
A tree is a tree
And a me is a me

Geoffrey, age 6

You go to play sometimes
You get mad at your shadow
For getting in your way

Richard, age 6

The "artistic focus" is a more symbolic poetic statement.In this focus, the language is beautiful; the rhythms are appropriate in many subtle forms; the figurative language catches moods, characters, and aspects of nature and living.

Mother, I wish for some golden shoes,
To walk in the beautiful spring,
Snow on mountaintops,
Flowers growing up toward the sky,I only wish for some golden shoes.

Giselle, age 9

The yellow flowers remind me
of my mother's hair
The pond that sparkles in the sun
reminds me of my mother's eyes

Susan, age 8

Wolsch says the poetic process involves turning away from literal meanings, and turning towards thoughts about aesthetic feelings.

Reference: Early Years, Feb. 1982

Dr. Leland Jacobs, poet, writer, and educator, says that beginning student poets need feelings of immediate accomplishment, of "I can". Jacobs recommends that young poets be given many "snap-shot" poetry experiences. This type of poetry is simplistic but also uses a poetic thought in an appropriate (but easily managed) form.

Much of what the children will be writing will be free form (unrhymed) verse. However, as the pupils are introduced to more and more forms, the teacher can guide them o many different kinds of poetry and poetry formats.

Each child will soon begin to invent their own forms, or will start choosing a variety of forms to experiment with. Each child will develop preferences for certain poetry forms. Have them try all the forms you introduce, but let them shine at what they are best at, too!

One snap-shot form is to use the first line as a greeting, the second line to ask a question:

Hello Daffodil!
How was your winter?

Jenny, age 7

Another format that is short but productive is the Goodbye, Hello format:

Goodbye liver,
Goodbye cheese,
Hello pizza,
Come in please.

Marvin, age 9

The With, Without form evokes strong feelings about friends, family and even objects:

With you I am a peaceful pond,
Without you, I am a muddy puddle.

Tracy

With you, I am a happy horse running free,
Without you, I am a stubborn little burro

Joey

The Sometimes snap-shot poem evokes contrasts and helps children form effective metaphores:

Sometimes I am a beautiful white swan,
Sometimes, an ugly duckling

Jennifer

Sometimes I am a rocky cliff,
Sometimes, a sandy beach

Jeff

Contrasts cab be developed in the First...then...First things first format. Emotions can be symbolically displayed in this snap-shot poem:

First dark clouds,
And then rain
First the shadow
Then the sun,
First things first!

Anne, age 7

Haiku is a short, managable form that young poets seem to like. Haikus consists of three lines: a five syllable, a seven syllable and a five syllable:

March winds, bring showers
May and June full of flowers
For springtime's bright hours

(HINT: For very young children use words instead of syllables: five words, seven words, five words).

Cinquians are a bit longer and consist of five lines: two syllables, four syllables, six syllables, eight syllables, two syllables:

The wind,
Came to play,
It rushed, it pushed, it shoved,
It took my hat and then it laughed
At me

Reference: Early Years, March 1982

Three other types of snap-shot poetry are very effective with young poets. The first type is a descriptive form where children give hints as to the identity of the person or object, but do not name it until the last line:

I am	I am furry
I am	I am black
I am	I am tall
You are	You are smart
They are	They are short
We all are	We all are big
Because	Because I am King Kong!

Sam, age 9

Acrostic poems can be done in many patterns and forms. The verses need not be rhymed:

word: cat

Cute, cuddle,
And purring all the while,
That's why cats are so cute!

The free form poetry below need not be rhymed. It can be shaped as the author wishes. The idea is to use good action or descriptive words to show a change, transition or movement:

ice
cold, hard,
freezing, killing, snowing
hail, sleet, slush, snow,
thawing, slipping, refreshing,
warmer, softer,
water

Reference: Young Poets And Authors Project, Dr. Thomas Newcomb, 1982-1990

Supplemental visits by local poets or artists can greatly enhance your poetry project,

Check local directories or phone books for local writers groups, state or local arts and humanities councils, and local writing clubs or guilds.

Your nearest college or library may be a source for finding local poets or writing groups that could visit the classroom.

CLASSROOM TIPS

A poetry center in your room is a good way to provide poetry experiences. This could be a table where anthologies are provided to be read during free time. Another idea is to tape readings of some favorite poems to be listened to independently during free time. Children might like to tape record themselves reading their favorite poems.

A bulletin board is a nice way to provide poetry experiences. It could be a place where famous poets and their poems are displayed, all the way up to a center with pictures for description and rhyming word lists for the children to use in writing their own creations.

Teachers, or the children, can make poerty mobiles with cardboard, magazine pictures and provided poems that can be hung around a classroom.

Art can be integrated into poetry writing in several ways. One of the best is using original art as a springboard for writing. Children can make collages, painted pictures or drawings about a general topic. Then, they can write personal verses about their pictures. These should e hung up on a wall or in the hallway because they make wonderful, brilliant displays.

Always provide acceptance, appreciation and praise for the work of the pupils. Take time to read the students' poems in class, or let them read their own. Use a wall or bulletin board to display their work where all can see.

FOLLOWING UP

At the end of your unit, it is nice to have a culminating activity. A poetry fair is a nice way to close down your poetry instruction. Children can read their poems to the class or to a larger group of pupils from the school. A prominent place in the school can be used to display artwork, poems and photos of the poets. Parents can be invitied to the festivities.

A class anthology of original poems is also a nice project. Students can select their best work for the book. They may also wish to illustrate their poetry.

There are many word processing and publishing programs made for classroom computers that will compose very professional looking books, that the youngest of pupils can design themselves. If photocopying is available in the school, copies of the anthology can be made for all the students, and perhaps the school library.

The press can be invited to the poetry fair or poetry day to provide an exciting experience for the students.

Other follow-up acitivities could be making performances of poetry on cassettes with sound effects or film performance videos complete with costumes.

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Rocket in My Pocket, Carl Withers, Scholastic Books

Tine for Poetry, Mary Hill Arbuthnot, Scott, Foresman and Co.

Where the Sidewalk Ends, Shel Silverstein, Harper and Row

TEACHER MATERIALS:

Calliope, Gretta Lipson and Jane Romatowski, Good Apple Books

Creative Writing Rocket, Linda Schwartz, The Learning Works

Helping Children Write with Greater Ease and Success, Jacque Wurtenburg, Bureau of Education and Research

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